

HOME FOR EVERY AMERICAN

GOVERNOR AWARD: Alabama Governor Bob Riley

"Preventing and ending homelessness in Alabama will be impossible without collaboration by government agencies, the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and faith-based and community partners," stated Alabama Governor Bob Riley in issuing the new 2007 *Statewide Data Report on Homelessness in Alabama* that advances the Governor's goals in planning and partnership under the Alabama "Blueprint Toward a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness" produced in 2006.

Governor Riley signed a new Executive Order in 2005 creating the Governor's Statewide Interagency Council on Homelessness to develop and implement a plan to prevent and end homelessness in Alabama and to serve as a statewide planning and policy development resource. The Council was established within the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, under the direction of Sydney Hoffman. The Council maintains a standing agenda item to identify and address barriers to preventing and ending homelessness, resulting in initiatives such as the recent resolution of access to identification for reentering prisoners.

The 2006 "Blueprint Toward a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness" cited fiscal optimization, evaluation of available services, public awareness, increasing access to permanent housing, and developing comprehensive and accessible statewide data on homelessness as keys to creating a successful foundation upon which progress to eradicate homelessness can be built. Alabama's Plan recognizes the importance of using the Housing First model.

The Blueprint identified a "pressing need" for accurate statewide baseline data about homelessness, resulting in the new data report. The data report relies on multiple federal, state, and local data sources, as well as focus groups with currently or previously homeless individuals across the state conducted by AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) members from the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (GFBCI) and individual stories of homelessness collected by the VISTAs.

The state's initiatives toward planning and partnership also prompted the 2006 convening of an alliance of more than 40 Alabama counties with largely rural populations to pursue the development of a multi-county rural plan that would complement the state initiative.